

University of Wollongong

Research Online

Faculty of Law, Humanities and the Arts -
Papers

Faculty of Arts, Social Sciences & Humanities

1-1-2013

Submission to the Strategic Policy Division, Department of Defence, on the Development of the 2013 Defence White Paper

Christopher Rahman
crahman@uow.edu.au

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/lhapapers>



Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#), and the [Law Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Rahman, Christopher, "Submission to the Strategic Policy Division, Department of Defence, on the Development of the 2013 Defence White Paper" (2013). *Faculty of Law, Humanities and the Arts - Papers*. 903.

<https://ro.uow.edu.au/lhapapers/903>

Research Online is the open access institutional repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library: research-pubs@uow.edu.au

Submission to the Strategic Policy Division, Department of Defence, on the Development of the 2013 Defence White Paper

Abstract

This submission on the development of the 2013 Defence White Paper addresses briefly four aspects:

1. The structure and content of the White Paper itself
2. Australia's strategic environment
3. Australia's military strategy
4. Force structure

Keywords

division, strategic, department, defence, development, 2013, white, paper, policy, submission

Disciplines

Arts and Humanities | Law

Publication Details

C. Rahman Submission to the Strategic Policy Division, Department of Defence, on the Development of the 2013 Defence White Paper 2013 pp.1-3 Canberra Department of Defence Website

This submission on the development of the 2013 Defence White Paper addresses briefly four aspects:

1. The structure and content of the White Paper itself
2. Australia's strategic environment
3. Australia's military strategy
4. Force structure

1. Structure and content of the White Paper

a) The purpose of the White Paper needs to be well understood: to establish and explain Australia's defence policy, military strategy and force structure plans to the Government and policy communities, members of the Australian Defence Force (ADF) and the Australian people. This may seem an obvious point to make, but it is important. After the 2009 White Paper implicitly identified China as the leading source of regional instability a significant degree of public criticism ensued, including from several former senior diplomats and from China itself. There will no doubt be pressure placed upon drafters of the 2013 White Paper to produce a more banal, less meaningful document to avoid such criticisms. That would be a mistake, for three reasons.

First, the 2009 White Paper's judgement on China was realistic, measured and strategically sound. Second, Defence White Papers should not be viewed as fulfilling a primarily diplomatic purpose. To do so would undermine the main purpose outlined above. Third, Australia is an open Western liberal democracy: Government owes the public (and ADF personnel) its honest appraisal of the strategic environment and potential threats to Australia and to regional stability. Policy documents must not be tailored to appease foreign governments, and particularly not a distinctly unfriendly totalitarian one.

b) The White Paper shouldn't try to be too comprehensive. Some commentators criticised the 2009 White Paper for its lack of detailed budget analysis and plans. These are important aspects of the defence planning process and public debate, but needn't be part of the White Paper document itself. Likewise, sections on management, personnel, support etc could easily be excised and produced as subsidiary documents, allowing the White Paper to focus more sharply on the most essential elements of policy, strategy and force structure.

c) Australia's strategic lexicon has been employed inconsistently over time and even within single documents. More care needs to be taken with the use of strategic concepts and terminology, such as 'defence self reliance' and 'primary operational environment.' For the sake of clarity, in certain cases the use of contested or ambiguous terminology should cease altogether.

2. Australia's strategic environment

d) Some opinion has asserted that Australia's strategic situation has changed significantly since the release of Force 2030 in 2009. On the contrary, there have been no major strategic discontinuities. The so-called American 'pivot to Asia,' whilst more substantive than mere political symbolism, nevertheless hardly represents a major new realignment; rather it is a return to trend following the winding down

of post-9/11 imbroglios in Afghanistan and Iraq. The United States, and particularly the U.S. Navy-dominated Pacific Command, has never lost its focus on maintaining stability in maritime East Asia.

e) Too much analysis of the strategic environment has been excessively, and simplistically, materialistic in nature: e.g., comparing and second guessing regional military force structures and capabilities. The underlying trend, dominated by a rising, non-status quo, increasingly combative China, and the response to that unwelcome phenomenon, has been a consistent and well documented process for the best part of two decades. Assumed material advances in the PLA armoury in recent times only enhance, but do not substantively alter, that trend.

f) The serious fiscal constraints currently negatively affecting Defence are unlikely to be long lasting, simply because the dynamic, unstable and increasingly dangerous regional security situation will demand a strengthened ADF rather than a more modest one over the medium term.

3. Australia's military strategy

g) Force 2030 and earlier Defence policy documents all suffer from a common problem. The security environment, Australia's interests and vague concepts of military strategy in the 2009 White Paper were generally sound enough; yet Force 2030 then flowed directly to detailed force structure plans. A major step in the process leading to the formulation of force structure was missing: that of the specific tasks that the joint force must be capable of conducting at the tactical and operational levels of warfare in order to deliver strategic effect. Or, in other words, what strategic effects should the ADF be capable of generating to operationalize the military strategy in service of the policy and national interest frameworks set out in the White Paper? A clear development of this aspect would better demonstrate the strategic rationale for particular force structure decisions.

h) The inherently maritime geography of our region is as widely recognized as it is poorly understood. The sea first and foremost is a medium for mobility. That can be of great advantage to Australia. The longstanding view of the northern archipelagos as presenting physical air and sea 'gaps' to be defended is a prime example of such misunderstanding. The maritime environment is a vast manoeuvre space for the joint force. To take advantage of our favourable geostrategic circumstances we need a Defence Force which is highly mobile and capable of operating over the great distances of the western Pacific and Indian Ocean theatres of operation. As the Chief of Navy has astutely recognized, Australia's strategic approach should be neither continentalist nor expeditionary, but maritime, for the joint force.

i) Those who prefer to focus on short-range air and subsurface forces to deny enemy access to the continent itself would severely limit the capability, flexibility and utility of the joint force. It is recognized that some spruik such a strategy and consequential force structure at least implicitly to constrain the options of future governments, specifically by limiting the ability of the ADF to contribute to potential U.S. operations in defence of its allies and the existing geopolitical order in East Asia. It would be both dangerous and irresponsible to intentionally hamstring future ADF

capabilities. Not only does Australia have a direct and vital national stake in the maintenance of a U.S.-led regional and world order, but we also cannot predict the circumstances in which the application of the ADF may be required, even in the near-term future, let alone in 2030 or 2050.

4. Force structure

j) No substantive, detailed rationale has ever been provided to the public on why particular force structure decisions have been made, particularly those costing many billions of dollars. Are we expected to accept at face value, for example, that 100 combat aircraft or twelve submarines are somehow 'magic' force structure numbers? Defence needs to explain, whether in the White Paper or elsewhere, and within the constraints of publicly releasable information, the rationale for such decisions.

k) It has been increasingly common for some Government officials and even senior ADF officers to argue for certain decisions on the basis of 'efficiency.' This is inappropriate. Obviously, military capability must be developed within budgetary constraints, but capability is developed to provide strategic effect, not efficiency in the business/management school sense. Evaluation of capability thus must be on the basis of military effectiveness, not efficiency: i.e., can it do the job asked of it in times of crisis? An example may be the Air Force preference for a single type, all F-35 Joint Strike Fighter air combat force. Although F-35 capabilities are classified, we do know that many of its reputed advantages derive from its stealth and network centric warfare (NCW) capabilities. Yet, if a potential adversary could effectively counter stealth and NCW (hardly inconceivable), how effective would the aircraft then be? No doubt a single type would be more 'efficient' in simple management terms; but would it necessarily be more militarily effective? Perhaps a combined F-35 and F/A-18F/EA-18G force would be more flexible, redundant and effective after all?

l) The need for a long-range, high endurance maritime-focused strategy has been established above; as has also the need to establish the types of strategic effects demanded by defence policy and strategy before determining medium-term force structure decisions. In that context, it would be useful to distinguish between essential and second order capabilities. Take the future submarine, for example: it will need to have the range and endurance to be able to undertake antisubmarine warfare, anti-shipping, and intelligence gathering tasks in a vast arc across the Indo-Pacific area, from Northeast Asian waters to the Persian Gulf. Less essential, aspirational capabilities which could be deleted from plans are land attack (due to Tomahawk's cost and very limited bang for buck) and special forces insertion.

m) Much focus has been given to 'jointness,' especially in the context of the upcoming LHD capability. This is understandable and necessary, but it must also be understood that each Service must first and foremost be master of their own primary operating environment, whether that be land, sea or air.

The existing White Paper framework does not need radical surgery, just more focus and clarity.